

Frequently Asked Questions, Carus Fire in La Salle, Illinois 1/18/2023

What happens next?

Illinois EPA and U.S. EPA will oversee cleanup of the Carus property and are in daily communication with site representatives. The cleanup will involve removing fire debris, demolition of impacted structures, treatment of contaminated water, and possible contaminated soil removal. Weekly meetings with updates on progress will occur beginning Thursday, January 19, between government agencies and company. The City of La Salle will be present in those meetings.

What do I do about stains or damage to my property?

Carus has established a community hotline to address residents' needs as they arise. You can call 815-224-6662 for more information. Carus has partnered with local car and home cleaning services as well as vehicle detailing companies. As of Tuesday, January 17, the company has received over 200 calls, cleaned about 47 vehicles and pressure washed five homes. Carus is maintaining a website with further details at <https://www.carusllc.com/carus-llc-fire-news-updates/>.

Are my animals safe?

The Illinois Department of Agriculture recommended washing your pet's paws and coat when they returned from outside in the days following the fire. Following the fire, pet owners were advised to look for any skin irritation, difficulty breathing, or vomiting/diarrhea. If those symptoms arise, owners should contact their veterinarian for a follow-up. A fact sheet was developed which is posted on the Illinois Department of Agriculture's website:

<https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Documents/LaSalle%20Fire%20Guidance%20Final.pdf>.

Why are fire departments expected to dispose of clothing or equipment due to exposure to this material, but cleaning is all that is required for me?

Firefighters were in direct contact with the concentrated chemical, smoke and run-off during firefighting operations. Fire Department policy and procedures requires that turnout gear be professionally cleaned or replaced after exposure during any type of chemical fire, per manufacturer's recommendations.

Was the City prepared for such an event?

The City of La Salle took the initiative to create a Disaster Maintenance Plan around a decade ago. The plan is not event-specific but is to be used as a general guide for city responsibilities and roles following a major disaster. It is updated and reviewed, generally, every couple of years following an election or when many new city staff members are appointed and are needed to be updated on the plan. This plan was last updated and reviewed in January 2021. This plan will also be updated in the coming months as part of a bi-annual review as well as to discuss how to improve our response.

Did Carus have a Risk Management Plan?

According to U.S. EPA records, this is not a risk management program (RMP) facility. The facility acknowledged it is not in the RMP program.

Was the air monitoring discontinued?

Air monitoring was discontinued by U.S. EPA on Friday, January 13, when the La Salle Fire Chief declared the fire extinguished and there were no odors, vapors or other emissions apparent outside the plant. Environmental contractors continue to perform perimeter air monitoring around the facility at the fence line for any air contamination. Perimeter air monitor continued by the facility and results have been

consistent with U.S. EPA findings, with real-time air monitor results within acceptable Occupational Safety and Health Administration and U.S. EPA limits.

What did the EPA air monitoring look for?

During a response scenario such as this one, the exact chemical being released is rarely known. Therefore, U.S. EPA designates hazard categories. For this incident, it was known that there was an oxidizer release. U.S. EPA's equipment has capabilities of analyzing for acids (i.e., mineral acid, as indicated by hydrochloric acid) and oxidizer (fluorine oxidizer as indicated by chlorine) both of which are chemicals of concern but were not involved in the fire. The other concern was general particulate matter (PM), which are very small particles or ash from materials consumed in the fire, which are indicated on U.S. EPA air monitoring reports as PM10 (small particles) and PM2.5 (very small particles). U.S. EPA also monitored for the standard parameters of oxygen, lower explosive limit, hydrogen sulfide, carbon monoxide and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Data summaries and locations are available on the website at: <https://response.epa.gov/lasallechemicalfire>.

What chemicals could have been released and at what quantities?

The fire occurred in the building where the company stored potassium permanganate prior to shipping. potassium permanganate rapidly degrades in the environment to form manganese dioxide, which is a non-harmful mineral form of manganese. It is estimated that over 1 million pounds of potassium permanganate was stored in the building prior to the fire.

Was there any impact to the nearby water treatment plant?

The local wastewater treatment plant was notified of the incident and began monitoring inflows into the plant for any impacts. No impacts occurred to the city drinking water or wastewater plants. U.S. EPA and Carus remain in contact with the plant manager. Potassium permanganate is used extensively for treatment of harmful contaminants in both drinking water and wastewater plants across the country.

The Safety Data Sheet (SDS) says potassium permanganate should not enter drains or waterways.

Where did the run-off go?

SDS's typically state how the product should be handled in its concentrated form. Potassium permanganate is used in solutions as a disinfectant, deodorizer, bleaching agent, and in air and water purification. Most all the material that ran-off the burning building with firefighting water entered an emergency containment pond on the Carus property, where it is currently contained. A plan to safely treat and manage this contaminated water is currently under development in coordination with the agencies.

After recent rain events, will there be additional testing of the local waterways?

Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has been monitoring the Little Vermilion River and Illinois River for signs of discoloration and fish/animal kills. The Conservation Police have not found any evidence to date of impacts. When diluted, potassium permanganate shows up as pink in very low concentrations.

Will the release of potassium permanganate impact drinking water?

Potassium permanganate, after being neutralized, leaves behind manganese dioxide, a naturally occurring mineral. In normal soil conditions, manganese dioxide is stable and is unlikely to leach into groundwater. Potassium permanganate is used by municipalities all over the country to treat harmful contaminants in drinking water and is also injected into the ground to treat harmful soil contaminants.

Will drinking water be monitored?

Drinking water is already extensively monitored in the City of LaSalle on an ongoing basis. Based on the local geology, it is unlikely that the manganese dioxide, which may remain on the soil, will migrate to groundwater in concentrations where it might cause concern. Regardless, if residents have questions about their well water quality, they can contact the LaSalle County Health Department Water Well Program: <https://www.lasallecountyil.gov/460/Water-Well-Program>.